

# A Letter to My Son

## George Ryga

Dramatis Personae

OLD LEPA

STEFAN, his son

NANCY, a social worker

MARINA, Old Lepa's sister

DMITRO, Marina's husband

Doubles for the FANATIC, ghost of HANYA and other incidental cameos

### SETTING

*(Interior of a farm kitchen.)*

*(A table, two chairs, overhead electric light. Some suggestion of cupboards and hanging cooking utensils in background. All this is only suggested, with isolations only of items necessary to the normal functioning of the old man. There are to be no specific mechanical visuals in this set. It must be a room as viewed through the eyes of its elderly, widowed, lonely occupant. He only sees what is useful and essential to him, all else flows out of focus. It has been many years since fine touches of another presence—or even his own expression of self through choice of paint, artifacts, design of kitchen furnishings—have mattered all that much to him.)*

*(The staging could be on two levels: the lower front level where most action in the play takes place, and a slightly elevated level to the rear where he encounters his memories in fading and indistinct surroundings. Should he have to move to this area to encounter his past, his frailty and thwarted optimism may be heightened in having to cope with the rise in levels.)*

*(NANCY, whose relationship with him is immediate and ongoing, would have her entrances and exits directly into his kitchen area. The others would enter only as indicated for extensions of memory.)*

## ACT I

*(The play opens on OLD LEPA at the table, seated. He is laboriously composing a letter in a scribbler, such as the ones used by school children as exercise books. Under musical opening, he labours for a long while over a phrase, then erases it. Tries again, ponders what he has written thus far, or is about to write.)*

*(MUSIC: Strains of a lively Ukrainian folk dance which segues into opening bars of "Solidarity Forever." On a head shake of discontent from OLD LEPA, music abruptly changes to portion of "O Canada" which segues into "Land of Hope and Glory" but abruptly cuts to opening bars of Soviet national anthem. OLD LEPA slaps scribbler on table and music cuts to "God Save the Queen," which almost immediately segues into "The Internationale"—cross-fading out into "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and lively folk dance at opening, with the folk dance music taking dominance and then dying out.)*

*(Sounds of crickets and distant dogs barking—sounds which continue in background of play, only to fade out as indicated.)*

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): Dear Stefan: How is everything with you? I hope good. I wrote you the time I went to the doctor with my back. They know nothing... the doctors... so they found nothing wrong with me that time. If nothing is wrong, then how come it hurts so much? If they *found* something wrong, would it hurt even more? I tell you, Stefan, conversing with a man of learning these days is talking to the deaf. Whatever they know, they keep to themselves. Not like some others... and I hope you will forgive me for saying so. I am writing this letter to say I am not happy with you.... (OLD LEPA *stares at the letter he has written. He sighs and drops it on the table with exasperation.*)

OLD LEPA: That is a wrong way to begin—it is neither one thing nor another! Why is it when I write a letter, I am making a wallet out of wood? Lepa, you have lived a long time, but you have learned nothing... not a damned thing. What way is this to write a letter to your son, eh? Don't dance around and hem and haw like a coward—say it! My son is an educated man and would laugh at this foolishness. You haven't started to tell him, and already half the page is used up. What has the doctor got to do with now and what happened? *(He sits glumly staring at the scribbler, oblivious to the sounds of his fields and outside world.)*

OLD LEPA (*Beginning to write again*): Dear Stefan... ach! What am I doing? The words fall like stones on the paper. *(He pushes the scribbler away and drops the pencil on the table. Sits brooding.)* I should tell him maybe how the fields look in the setting sun... black trees holding up the sky, and between them and me, all them fields of yellow wheat glowing in a holy fire! Yeh... tell him that, and then give him shit!

*(NANCY enters into perimeter of set, an overstuffed attache case in her hand.)*

NANCY: Mister Lepa?

OLD LEPA: She came by today... in her little car that makes a tink, tink sound under the hood when she parks it in my front yard near the lilac bush... and she walks to where I'm standing... looking at the fields. *(Sound of outside world dies on remembered conversation with Nancy.)*

NANCY: Mister Lepa?

OLD LEPA: Yah?

NANCY (*Smiling*): Mister Lepa?

OLD LEPA (*Impatiently*): Yah? What is it?

NANCY: Mister Lepa—you've died. (*Light dies on NANCY. Bird and barking dog sounds return in background. OLD LEPA rises and pours himself a hot drink.*)

OLD LEPA: That happened... when? Yesterday? A year ago?... It don't make no difference. She came that first time... brief case in her hand with "Government of Canada" written on it... to tell me that I've died! And I think to myself—the government of Canada comes to an old man's farm in a small Japanese car to tell him that good news. I think some more, and I begin to laugh. (*OLD LEPA chuckles at the memory.*) If I was the government of Canada, I would at least listen for a heartbeat before I pronounced a man dead!

(*Sad musical bridge—an old mournful Ukrainian folk melody which fades slowly. OLD LEPA settles at the table with his mug and wipes his eyes with the sleeve of his shirt. He moves scribbler and pencil to himself and begins to write.*)

OLD LEPA: If only words were like feelings—free and simple as the rain and wind, how well would I write what I wish to say! But this... this is the labour of the damned! I think words come easy for my Stefan. He is an educated man... my Stefan. He speaks well... now if only he knew more.

STEFAN (*Entering in memory*): I think you should leave this farm, father. I can find you an apartment in town, with someone to come in and....

OLD LEPA (*Writing furiously*): Words come easy for my son... it's the thoughts that are difficult for him!

STEFAN (*Impatiently*): There's nothing for you here! There never was, you know. Look—you've sold the land, so why hang on to this house and garden? Where are your neighbours now? In town—in apartments and rest homes!

OLD LEPA (*Still writing, but glaring into distance*): My boy always had a way with words—especially when saying stupid things! There—I've said it, and I feel better already! (*He sits back, momentarily content. But remorse quickly settles in.*) Why am I like this—saying such things? I am old enough to have a pension. But I got no pension. It's time maybe to shut my mouth and not say everything that comes into my head. But... I can't help myself. They bring it out of me. (*He shakes his head in wonder at his follies and reaches uncertainly for his drink.*) They bring it out of me—my sister, Marina...and her Dmitro. The ones who did good. The ones the Angliki call "them good Ukrainians"... I am sixty-five years old that day. An old man, no? (*Sounds of outdoor world abruptly stop.*) I'm cleaning the chicken coop... pushing the wheelbarrow and putting manure in the garden. Stefan had sent me chocolates by mail the day before—why, I'll never know. I still got my own teeth, but eating chocolates—even one small piece—makes them hurt now. I hear Dmitro and Marina's car drive up. And without looking, I know she doesn't like the smell of my yard. I know she will crinkle her nose in disgust, and I know she will say....

(*MARINA enters in periphery of upper level of stage, her arms out in a stylized and insincere greeting. And still in a stylized motion, she pinches her nose in disgust.*)

MARINA: Dear brother... Phew! What a stench! OLD LEPA (*Laughing*): God provides so few opportunities to sing for her... but this is one that fell into my lap, so to speak....

(OLD LEPA *hits the table rhythmically with his drinking mug and sings lustily.*)

OLD LEPA (*Sings to melody of "Bringing in the Sheaves"*): Bringing in the shit... Bringing in the shit— We shall come rejoicing Bringing in the shit!

(DMITRO *enters and stops beside her, breathless with rushing to get there. MARINA winces and glances disapprovingly at her husband. Then she reaches with her arms to OLD LEPA again.*)

MARINA: Happy birthday, my brother! (*Grinning, OLD LEPA half-acknowledges the greeting with a motion of his hand.*) May Almighty God in his wisdom give you many more years of good health!

OLD LEPA: You asking him, or telling him, Marusha? Sometimes it's hard to know the difference with you.

MARINA: I *ask* God for mercy! OLD LEPA: That's good to know.

MARINA (*Persisting*): I am a devout woman, Ivan. I pray whenever I have time....

OLD LEPA: So I hear. What about you, Dmitro? What do you think of all this praying business? (*DMITRO withdraws into background so as to be scarcely visible.*)

DMITRO: It's like Marina says....

OLD LEPA: Never mind what Marina says! She speaks to...and often *for*...God, I think. Surely, she doesn't speak for you as

well! (*DMITRO chuckles nervously and awkwardly turns his hat in his hands.*)

DMITRO: You know how it is. (*OLD LEPA turns to stare at him.*)

DMITRO (*Speaking quickly, eyes averted*): And so.. .how does it feel to reach the age of retirement, Ivan?

MARINA: Yes... how does it feel? (*OLD LEPA turns away from them, brooding and distressed.*)

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): My brother-in-law and my sister— when I think the worst of them I think the devil wore his way through a pair of boots finding them for one another—the clothing merchant and his wife. Dmitro speaks like a man, and he thinks. But all important questions about how he lives and thinks... are answered by Marina. She speaks for both of them... and when she has time, she speaks to God! But God must forgive me for such thoughts... these are good people. I owe them everything. To my death, I will owe them... for they raised my Stefan after Hanya died.

(*MARINA and DMITRO carry on a wordless conversation with him, which he ignores as he loses this memory. They retreat from him and vanish in gloom at far edge of stage. Sounds of outdoors are heard again. NANCY enters and pauses. He does not see her. She clears her throat. He ignores her. He begins writing his letter again, but her presence is distracting to him even though he refuses to acknowledge her. She is aware of this.*)

NANCY: What a beautiful day out there!...

OLD LEPA (*Grouchy*): How come they don't send a man to tell me?

NANCY: Tell you what?

OLD LEPA: About what you said the last time? (*She laughs and takes a seat. That act of forwardness upsets him, for he did not invite her to sit.*) Suppose I had glue on that chair—or fresh paint?

NANCY (*Startled, checks chair*): But there's no paint or glue.

OLD LEPA (*With exasperation*): What's the matter? They afraid to send a man to talk to a man?

Now I get the women! I dream when I'm sick my pall-bearers will be six women. (NANCY peers

*at him and reaches for his hand, which he draws away. She is upset.*)

NANCY: Oh, come now....

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): Ivan, Ivan...why do you do this? She is doing what she is paid to do.

You can live without this.. you are an old man now... friends all gone.... A pension would be good to have....

NANCY: I'm... I'm sorry.

OLD LEPA (*Angrily*): The goddamned pension—it didn't come!

NANCY: No. There have been problems.

OLD LEPA: Problems? What *is*—*problems*? When I was a young man and didn't do my job right, I had problems! Alright—I'm sixty-five years old, and I still got no problems. So give me my old man's pension! (NANCY is *humiliated and angry now*.)

NANCY. I don't carry pensions in my pocket like sticks of chewing gum, sir! If I did, you'd have it. (OLD LEPA is *taken aback by her anger. He stares blankly at her, his hands nervously tapping the table*.)

OLD LEPA (*Softly*): You don't have to shout. My ears still work.

NANCY: I wasn't shouting.

OLD LEPA (*Still softly*): Sure you were, but that's alright.

NANCY: I wasn't....

OLD LEPA: That's alright.

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): I look her up and down. She's not dumb, not this one. Not very respectful to an old man, but not dumb. She opens her briefcase and takes out an old newspaper.... (As *if on cue*, NANCY does exactly what OLD LEPA describes.)

NANCY: Here... read this.

OLD LEPA: She hands it to me. My glasses are someplace in the cupboard with the spoons and knives. Even if I had them on my nose, I don't know how to read English too good from such small print.

NANCY: Here.

OLD LEPA: What does it say?

NANCY: Read it yourself!

OLD LEPA: You read it to me. I don't bother with newspapers. They only tell capitalist lies.

(NANCY expects OLD LEPA to say more. With some amusement, she glances through the newspaper story.)

NANCY: Jesus... this newspaper was published in northern Ontario in 1934. There is a short report here on page two of a mine cave-in in Timmins in that year. (OLD LEPA rises *painfully to his feet*.)

OLD LEPA: So?

NANCY: You are among those listed as killed in the accident. You and a man named Olynyk.

(OLD LEPA moves wearily away from her, almost into gloom in periphery of set. She stares

*after him, then begins replacing the newspaper into her briefcase.)*

OLD LEPA (*Dulled, distant*): Have some coffee, missus. And put some in my cup, too.

NANCY: Thank you. (*She rises and busies herself with getting their drinks. OLD LEPA rocks on his feet, his back to her.*)

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): Vladek...Vladek Olynyk with the bad bones. He used to limp after finishing a shift. Something was wrong in his hips. That morning... we went together down the shaft. I stopped to tie my boots—he went on...I never saw him again. For suddenly the earth groaned... stones exploded before my eyes... a cloud of stinking dust covered me. Ahead of me was the cave-in... but I couldn't hear it. If anyone shouted, I couldn't hear him. I was deaf now... I stayed deaf for three weeks after. I know Vladek is dead—nothing to do about that. So I got the hell out of that mine... out of Timmins. Never once looked back. (*NANCY carries his coffee to OLD LEPA. He is startled out of his reverie and momentarily unsure of who she is or what she is doing in his home.*)

NANCY: Your coffee. Well? What do you think? OLD LEPA: Huh?

NANCY: The newspaper story....

OLD LEPA: That time—yah. So they thought I was in there with Vladek Olynyk? That's what they thought?

NANCY: That's what they wrote. You can see for yourself.

OLD LEPA: You can't believe what they say in a newspaper—there's your proof!

NANCY: What *did* happen, then?

OLD LEPA: I never punched out—that's what happened! I never saw anybody to tell them I quit their goddamn job. Walked seventeen miles that day. Train came along... I went west... where you live longer with less worry about stones falling on your head!

*(They both laugh and share their coffee in momentary silence. From outside, sounds of distant diesel locomotive, followed by bird cries.)*

OLD LEPA: Hear that? That's a small hawk... the day is ending. (*She moves away from him and pensively stares out a window.*)

NANCY: Yes.... This farm—why did you sell it?

OLD LEPA (*Suddenly agitated*): It's a good life, lady! Lots of work, but a good life. (*Sounds of music—a sad, melodic old Ukrainian folksong in background over his dialogue.*) This time of the year... sometimes I stand and look west into the setting sun... trees, like black candles holding up the sky... and between them and me, all them fields of wheat look like they was burning with a cold fire!

NANCY: But you sold it.

*(He struggles with his emotions, struggling for words to explain, justify. But his efforts break down into painful pacing, as music in background continues.)*

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): How easy it is for her to say that! As she looks to the machine shed and the empty barn... the barn Hanya built... with the other man.

NANCY: When did you sell your farm, Mister Lepa?

OLD LEPA (*To himself, anguished*): We needed money, so I went to the Crowsnest to work in a coal mine. We needed the money— that was all. Yet my heart still beats like a trip-hammer when I remember! How old must a man be before he forgets jealousy?

NANCY: You built this farm from a homestead.

OLD LEPA (*Harshly*): None of your business! (NANCY is *startled and half-turns to him*.)

NANCY: What in hell is that all about—"none of your business"? (OLD LEPA *tries to choke back his feelings, but is not successful*.)

OLD LEPA: Nothing... forget it....

NANCY: There are people I work with who get by very well by demanding, even shouting, at their clients to get information they need. I swore I would never do that...if only because / don't like being shouted at. Am I wrong in thinking that? Well?

OLD LEPA (*Embarrassed*): I *shout* at you? NANCY: Yes. You *shout* at me!

OLD LEPA: Sit down—I'll tell you! My wife is always in my mind... not one day do I forget her... hunched like a little girl in her big mackinaw, her belly big with Stefan. She's walking through snow from barn to house, barn to haystack... I still see her like that. Carrying pails and forkfuls of timothy hay for the two milk cows... and behind her.... (*He freezes on the memory, his mouth slack*.)

NANCY.- Is something wrong?

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): Two waterbuckets in his hands—the man whose name I never knew! The fanatic—his eyes on fire... soft lips set in a smile which means nothing to a sane man... an idiot. Until you spoke to him—to ask, "What in hell you doing in my house when I'm away?"

NANCY.- Here—sit down. (NANCY *takes* OLD LEPA *by the arm and guides him to his chair*.)

OLD LEPA *moves woodenly, his mind elsewhere*.) Take it easy.. I've got some brandy in the car. I'll be right back!

(*She exits hurriedly, leaving her belongings on the table. On her exit, vague form of a RAGGED MAN enters on distant area of set,*

*almost out of light, his arms extended. All outdoor sounds die on his entry*.)

FANATIC: I served the Lord, brother. Your wife needed help.... (OLD LEPA *rouses and stares at the apparition. He half-rises to his feet*.)

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): What the hell is this? I go away for a month and another man takes my place. Her belly showed before he came, so at least the child is mine. That's for sure!

FANATIC: Your wife needed help, mister!

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): I groan with doubt and guilt.. .an anger catches flame and burns inside of me, sounds crash through my head... my eyes go blind.... (OLD LEPA *gropes around and finds a hammer. He raises it and begins a slow approach to elevation where the apparition stands*.) And, through my blindness, I see the two of them like animals in my bed... in the haystack. She sees the thoughts devouring me and shouts with pain.... (*Recorded sounds of Hanya crying out in alarm. OLD LEPA advances slowly*.) The man is afraid as I come towards him....

FANATIC (*Whimpering in fear*): She *asked* me to stay and help!

OLD LEPA (*Roaring in rage*): Leave my land at once! (*Another recorded cry of pain from Hanya. OLD LEPA wheels around at the sound, the hammer raised high. The FANATIC vanishes*.) Begone, whore! Pack your things and go with him!

HANYA (RECORDED VOICE): No, Ivan! No! (OLD LEPA *drops the hammer to the floor and*

*his shoulders slouch with regret.*)

OLD LEPA (*Gently, softly*): Through the years, I see it all still.... the man runs across the field to the bush by the railway embankment on the lower end of the farm. I point after him... for her to follow. But she stays... and she cries and cries... Ivan, Ivan— will heaven forgive you for that?

(NANCY *enters with a small flask of brandy which she opens and holds out to him. Sounds of outdoors begin on her entry. Faint strains of the folk lovesong echo for a bar or two, and fade out in background.*)

NANCY (*Breathless*): You should be sitting when you feel unwell. Drink some of this—you'll feel better. (*As if by reflex., he takes the bottle and swallows a mouthful, wipes his mouth with his sleeve and returns the bottle to her. She puts it into her briefcase.*) Do you want a doctor?

OLDLEPA:Hah?

NANCY: Would you like a doctor to see you? Have you eaten today? (OLD LEPA *rouses from his reverie and moves to the table.*)

OLD LEPA: Nothing wrong, lady. I'm alright... same's you....

NANCY: Now, Mister Lepa—you homesteaded here and this was your farm?

OLD LEPA: Sure....

NANCY (*Delighted, picks up briefcase*): Good! Then it's in your name—which resolves whether you've been alive or not since that accident in 1934! (OLD LEPA *stares balefully at her. She becomes confused.*)

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): I like this young woman...but I'm not going to show it. Long ago I learned the best way to deal with government is to stare at it... and think of a toothache.

NANCY (*Uncertain*): Well? Why do you look at me that way?

OLD LEPA: No. NANCY: No, what?

OLD LEPA: Not in my name.

NANCY: What are you talking about?

OLD LEPA: Not in my name. When I took out homestead papers, I wrote them in Hanya's name. The work I did... places I went to... I didn't know if I'd be living or dead one day to the next. So everything I put in her name. She willed it to Stefan... like both of us wanted.. .but Stefan, he didn't want farming.

NANCY: Everything—in her name? I don't understand... here's you and....

OLD LEPA: This house he had excluded from the farm....

NANCY: That's not what I find odd... it's leaving everything to your wife, who no longer lives.

OLD LEPA: That's the way it should be—has to be. To be a widow immigrant is bad. To be a widow with nothing is like being blind and deaf and having nothing to eat.

NANCY (*Amused*): That bad, eh?

OLD LEPA: Worse... I don't tell things good.

NANCY: How in hell would you know what it's like to be a widow? (OLD LEPA *has no reply. He stares at her, blinking elaborately.*)

NANCY (*Laughing*): Then maybe you *were* a widow...in some other life!

OLD LEPA (*Coldly*): You laughing at me? NANCY: No. I'm not laughing.



OLD LEPA: That's good. I thought you was laughing. (NANCY *pulls out some forms and begins to review them.*)

NANCY: Okay—we have some forms to fill out.... You came to Canada... in what year? '  
(*Wordlessly, he explains and they carry on a soundless discussion. She corrects the odd notation in her forms. He never takes his eyes off her.*)

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): A floating Polish tub brought me here. I never had vermin and I was not Polish. But I was deloused and my head was shaved... and I came on a Polish passport. I had to have a health certificate... from the village doctor, who was drunk and stank of vomit. He said I had an ear infection. His open, trembling hand moved across the clinic table as he told me this. I put five zlotys in it, and the ear infection healed just like that. Twenty zlotys would have cured a cancer. He stamped my passport with good health, and all the time I stared at him as I stare at her.

NANCY: Everything in your wife's name, because you're worried about her.

OLD LEPA: To be an immigrant widow in Canada. ...(*Sees her smiling as she listens.*)

OLD LEPA (*Irritably, turning away*): To hell with you! Speaking with you is like speaking to a fence post!

NANCY: I.. I understand. I'm sorry. I know it means a lot to you.

OLD LEPA (*His back to her*): You laugh—but if you are a widow and don't speak the language—eh? Who would worry for you? Your neighbours? The government? The cowboy in tight pants who sells you shoes? Bullshit! Nobody worries for the poor! (NANCY *breaks into laughter, which she tries to choke back, but cannot. OLD LEPA turns and stares balefully at her.*) That's nice... I like that laugh. An honest woman. My Hanya laughed a little bit like that.

NANCY: Why, thank you. I didn't mean to.... OLD LEPA: Yah... I like that. What's your name?

NANCY: Nancy. (*He leans forward and takes her face in his hand. Studies it intently.*)

OLD LEPA: Nancy? Nancy?... Gimme the rest. (*She becomes a bit anxious, but doesn't know what to do.*)

NANCY: My name was on a letter I wrote you. OLD LEPA: I don't read letters. What's your name? NANCY: Nancy Dean.

OLD LEPA: Hah! (*Almost triumphantly, he releases her face and slaps the table.*)

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): Just like that, I know! She's not one of the Angliki... not with that face. Yet... could she be one of ours? They changed their names—I heard of such things. I had a section foreman whose name was Dobush, but who called himself MacGregor because Scotsmen got the good jobs. *Meester* MacGregor, we would say to him, our caps in our hands... give to me the good job. I have a prerwah.... (*He grins at the recollection.*) A hernia down here! (*Motions to his crotch.*)

NANCY: Is there something amusing about my name?

OLD LEPA: I want to know your real name! (NANCY is startled and *stares at him uncertainly.*)

NANCY:!! told you....

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): Oh, my child.. .if I was young again, we would find better things to do than talk of old men who lost their names. (*Sound of cheerful folk dance music. Strains of melody begin softly, as if across open fields.*) I was young once, you know. I didn't dance or

play then... or watch fields of grain at sunset, when the world seems to be on fire. (*Music slows and becomes haunting and mournful.*)

NANCY (*Moved*): I know you were young.

OLD LEPA (*Interrupting her*): This homestead is where my youth came to rest... right here. With a two-bladed axe, then out on the road, seeding and harvesting for others... from Manitoba to the Rocky Mountains... mining, railroading, cutting pulp-wood ... through a depression. Youth started and ended here... right here. We all danced at our weddings... and after that.... (*He rises heavily to his feet. Music ends abruptly. Sound of distant thunder.*) What's your name? Your real name, Nancy Dean?

NANCY (*Distressed*): What difference would it make, Mister Lepa? Would that help me to help you get your pension?

OLD LEPA: To hell with the pension! In my heart I know this— there are no people called Dean in Halychina. I could say more—but it is for you to speak.

NANCY (*Angrily*): It's for me to speak—and suddenly everything you needed to know will be self-evident?

OLD LEPA: Maybe yes, maybe no. I don't understand them big words.

(*NANCY slowly, methodically begins to replace her papers in her briefcase. Another sound of distant thunder. OLD LEPA strains to listen to it, as if judging whether it will bring good or troubles.*)

NANCY: I guess I should pack up and leave now. (*Pause.*) My grandfather's name... was Odinsky.

OLD LEPA (*With disinterest, still listening*): Ah... I knew a shepherd boy named Odinsky in the old country. He had this growth on his neck, and because of that he walked with his head to one side... like this.

NANCY (*Firmly*): Not this Odinsky. My grandfather was a Russian Jew, Mister Lepa! (*OLD LEPA turns slowly to stare at her, then he breaks into hearty laughter which discomfits NANCY.*)

OLD LEPA: When he landed in Halifax, Odinsky was hard to spell by immigration. So they gave him the name Dean?

NANCY: I guess so.... (*OLD LEPA moves to her and puts his arm around her shoulder reassuringly. He continues laughing.*)

OLD LEPA: How many names... going back six hundred—a thousand years—of warriors, merchants, slaves... died with the stroke of a pen in Halifax? Maybe one day we make a big monument of stone... of a man standing looking into the country... he's got hands, feet—everything. But no face. And we put that up in Halifax to remind us how we got a fresh start, no? (*They both laugh and lean towards each other. Laughter continues under Old Lepa's memory. Another sound of thunder, nearer now.*)

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): We laugh, but we are sad. There is much to forget before Halifax and all that business. I will not deny the pogroms, and you must know how poor I was. And that makes us sad.

NANCY: I have to go now.

OLD LEPA: So... after all these years, I have a Jew in my house. I'll make some tea for us.

NANCY: Not for me, thank you.

OLD LEPA: If I need tea, you need tea. So don't argue. *(He busies himself preparing water for heating. She watches him with mixed emotions. Suddenly she shudders and pulls at the collar of her blouse.)*

NANCY: Winters... must be lonely here.

OLD LEPA: Was worse once. No woodpile, you freeze. Now they bring the oil even in the summer. Your grandfather was a good man, I think.

NANCY *(With surprise)*: He's never mentioned you. Where did you meet him?

OLD LEPA: Here... there....

NANCY: My grandfather lived in Winnipeg.

OLD LEPA: Sure, I know. He was the city man... the rag and bone man... the man who sold shoes for a living. I was a country man. We spoke the same language, he and I. So we told each other what could not be understood in silence. He was a good man....

*(NANCY rises and retreats to exit, her eyes fixed on OLD LEPA at the stove. A roar of distant thunder. OLD LEPA does not acknowledge her departure. When she is gone, he returns to his table with a cup in his hand and resumes work on his letter.)*

OLD LEPA *(To himself, sadly)*: She is gone. Didn't wait for tea even. Was it something I said? Naw. She'll be back. *(Begins writing.)* Dear Stef an... I say things the best way I know how. The woman I told you about was here—and I thought to myself—why are you a bachelor? I will never understand. But that is your business. If you was married and had a son...

*(Ponders)...* if you had a son, and he was old enough, I would tell him what I could not tell you. Sure, I would! I was not a good man to hurt your mother like I did, Stef an. Telling her to leave this house and follow a man who would die that night. *(Distraught, OLD LEPA pushes the paper aside.)*

OLD LEPA: You cannot say such things, you crazy man! Stefan will not thank you for writing like that in a letter... yet someone has to know. I cannot die with that secret. No man should. *(Ancient liturgical music begins, passionate and distant. OLD LEPA rises and turns this way and that, as if searching for something he has lost. Sounds of anguish, indistinct outcries of pain.)*

OLD LEPA: Hanya? Is that you? *(HANYA, huddled and shawled, appears in dark periphery of memory stage. She faces him accusingly.)*

HANYA *(Pleading)*: No, Ivan... it's not what you think!

OLD LEPA: How was I to know, when he left long ago, staggering away through the snow like a drunkard... that he would try to cross the railway at the bottom of the farm?

HANYA: Don't make me go with him!

OLD LEPA: I was mad... as men like me are... to see him here in my place. I was young, Hanya... young and crazy!

HANYA *(Frantic)*: I am not guilty of what you think.

*(OLD LEPA tries to scale the elevation to reach her, his arms extended to her. But he stumbles and cannot rise. He speaks to her, but she retreats. In her place, the FANATIC appears, holding up a coarse wooden cross. He is ragged.)*

OLD LEPA: Oh, my God! Will he never leave me?

FANATIC: Let her stay. I only stopped by to help her plaster the walls of the house.

OLD LEPA: Leave my land! I wish to God I had never seen you!

*(The FANATIC retreats in fear. OLD LEPA slumps, clinging to the riser. The music fades and swells. Thunder crashes and echoes.)*

OLD LEPA *(Softly, to himself)*: I was told later he carried a cross to my house. The cross he carried to the doorsteps of other homesteads. They told me he was trying to find converts to some god he had made up in his sad, simple mind. He walked across that field there through snowdrifts to the railway in the coulee beside this farm. A wind blew that night, covering fields and trees in a white cloud. He couldn't see where he was going. He might have fallen to the track... or tried to walk on it until the train came. The train came... it hit him and threw him into a drift. He was found a week later when the section gang came along and saw one of his legs sticking out of the snow.

*(Off stage, sound of HANYA screaming in horror at hearing the story for the first time.*

*STEFAN crosses memory elevation in shadows. He is in a hurry. OLD LEPA tries without success to regain his feet and run to him.)*

OLD LEPA *(Crying out)*: Stefan! *(STEFAN stops abruptly and turns to OLD LEPA. STEFAN has the manner of an impatient professional interrupted in his thoughts.)*

STEFAN: What is it, you foolish old man? Can't you see I'm busy?

OLD LEPA: Just give me a moment to speak, my son. I know you have much on your mind... it must give you a headache sometimes to think of so much.

STEFAN: Well, speak.. .go on. Be precise and to the point. I have no time for animal grunts from the ignorant!

OLD LEPA: Only a moment....

STEFAN: I am an educated and refined man, as you can see. It's not all a blessing, you know. It is a terrible responsibility, weighing on me like two big suitcases on a hot day.

OLD LEPA: About your mother....

STEFAN: Or a carton of textbooks I have stupidly agreed to carry, but cannot find a place to put down.

OLD LEPA: I have never told you this, Stefan....

STEFAN: I have no interest in what you did or did not tell me. Can't you see how terribly, terribly busy I am? And may I ask who are you? Have you children in my school?

OLD LEPA: Your father....*(Music and other sounds die. STEFAN yawns with mock weariness.)*

STEFAN: What a bore some days can be. Will the girl never learn I can only see people by appointment?

OLD LEPA: Stefan... Stefan.... Your mother was the finest woman!

STEFAN: I keep telling her, but she behaves like a peasant incapable of learning.

OLD LEPA: A thousand times I have seen this nightmare of my foolish mind.. .wanting to tell you, but afraid I would anger you.

STEFAN: Come, come, old man—state your business. I have work to do.

OLD LEPA: She was carrying you when I ordered her out of my house. She didn't go, but something in her health and spirit died that day.

STEFAN: All this talk of death and dying is really most unsettling—are you aware of that? Do you really appreciate how much of a bother you are to the educational system?

OLD LEPA: A year after you were born, she got sick. I carried her in my arms down that road there. Hoping for a truck or a wagon to come along and drive her to the hospital. For two hours I carried her before help came. I was out of my mind.

STEFAN: That's impossible. Nobody leaves their mind in one place while travelling to another, in a manner of speaking. Therefore it is incorrect to employ such a metaphor thoughtlessly. It is also alarming to others.

OLD LEPA. Stefan—listen, please! She begged for us to go back... because we had left you alone in your crib. I ran all the way back to look after you. I forgot to say goodbye to her, I was that worried. She... never came back. She died. It was my fault that I had broken her spirit when she was so young and beautiful... that I had turned against her... betrayed the love I felt for her. I am an old man, soon I will die. I ask for your understanding... and forgiveness. Stefan! (*Liturgical music sounds faintly. Also sounds of storm. STEFAN stares at OLD LEPA, then knots his hands into fists.*)

STEFAN (*In petulant rage*): Betrayed her? You killed her, you ridiculous old bastard! (*He rushes off stage. OLD LEPA half rises and lurches at the table, his face contorted with anguish. He grabs the letter he has been writing and tears it out of the scribbler and tears it to shreds. Hard crash of thunder and sound of rain deluge on fast blackout.*)

## ACT II

(Same setting as in Act I. OLD LEPA is at his table, laying out a hand of solitaire. NANCY appears and hesitates.)

NANCY (*Calling*): Hello!

OLD LEPA: Come in. The door has no lock.

NANCY: And how are you today, Mister Lepa? (*She moves towards him, but keeps her distance. He ignores her.*) I'm sorry I couldn't come this morning as I planned to do, but something came up at the office....

OLD LEPA: She has no interest in how my day has been. She is not sure of herself... not sure how to take me... the government in my house. Why does she not come as a friend? Make some tea for both of us? Tell me I'm getting absent-minded... forgetting to shave and change my shirt? She insists on being nice... I don't like nice people, and that's for sure.

NANCY: Mister Lepa?

OLD LEPA (*Gruffly*): Sit down and don't bother me. I'm busy. (*For a long moment he continues his game in silence. She becomes uncomfortable.*)

NANCY: But you're not doing anything. You're just sitting there.... OLD LEPA: I'm busy thinking....

NANCY: I spoke with my supervisor, Mister Lepa. He was not sympathetic. Nothing you have told me helps your case! Are you listening?

OLD LEPA: Sure I'm listening. What case? I'm a man, not a tool-box. What have I got to do with some kind of case where you put things into?

NANCY: It would help if you could tell me the names and whereabouts of surviving friends you once had.

OLD LEPA: This morning I went to town to get the mail. My pension cheque wasn't there... that's all I got to say to you!

NANCY (*With irritation*): Come on, Mister Lepa...stop playing silly games with me. I'm here to help you.

OLD LEPA: Funny how everybody comes to help me... one more helper and I don't have time to play cards, take a crap, or go to sleep. So go away.

NANCY: You have reason to be angry. I'm sorry about all the problems. But if you could only tell me about some friend you have known from the early years.

OLD LEPA: How much money you make a month? (*NANCY is taken aback. She takes a seat opposite him and stares at OLD LEPA disconsolately.*)

NANCY: What in hell has that got to do with anything?

OLD LEPA (*Angrily*): Maybe nothing for you... but lots for me. I'm old. I got a right to a pension. That's all I got to say. If you don't understand, turn your car around and get out of here. Tell your government to go to hell, too! No more talk! I play cards now! (*He plays his cards angrily. She remains watching him. He glares at her. She returns his gaze. He lifts his chair and noisily moves to sit with his back to her. He rudely moves his arrangement of cards on the table to face him.*)

NANCY: You've got the four of clubs to go on the five of hearts. (*OLD LEPA notices his*

*oversight and angrily makes the change.)*

OLD LEPA: Shit!

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): I *had* a friend. I called him *mazur*. He was Polish, and to me, every Polyak is a mazur. For the bishop of Warszawa, he would have given his right arm. As he would have for the Polish gentry, who exported him like so much meat to dig tunnels and lay railway track.

NANCY: Surely there was a friend. (*Shadowy FIGURE in work coveralls appears, moving slowly through shadows of memory stage.*)

OLD LEPA: "Wake up, mazur!" I shout and shake him in the morning. "The bolsheviks have taken Warszawa and they're making babies in your sister and your mother!" He sits and crosses himself with this hand big as a shovel. Then he clears his throat and spits behind his bed, like the Polyaks do... scratches his ass through his long underwear, and starts to speak to me.

MAZUR: You blaspheme all you want, hutzul. One day, you'll pay for it.

OLD LEPA (*Turning to memory, laughing*): How? I have no money. How can I play without money?

MAZUR: Something will happen to your back. I've seen others with no respect for God or homeland get it that way. You'll learn... when it's too late....

OLD LEPA (*Still laughing*): When that happens, mazur, I go straight to a doctor.

MAZUR: Won't do no good. When that happens, you're a cripple until you die. No doctor living can heal the judgement of God, hutzul. Every Polyak knows that.

(*The shadowy FIGURE takes out a tiny pocket pouch and begins replacing torn buttons on his coveralls. OLD LEPA watches him wistfully for a moment, then turns to NANCY. Faint, pastoral music begins to play in background.*)

OLD LEPA: We work, argue about politics and God, make soup together. At night we play cards or smoke and talk of our families. Born a Polyak, he never learned to read or write his own language. I read Polish... I read his letters from his mother to him, and write back for him as if she was my own mother. "Dear mother" I say, and it is like I am addressing my mother. When Hanya and I marry, he works both our shifts for three days. I offer to return the money he earned for me. But he won't take it... even though he is a mazur, and I heard it said in the old country that mazurs take anything that's not tied to a post. (*Shadowy FIGURE on memory stage has lifted a block of wood upright and seated himself on it, as he sews.*)

MAZUR: Maybe one day I'll marry and go away for three days. Then you can do the same for me.

OLD LEPA (To FIGURE): To which I said—how could that be? Who'd marry a mazur? You were born missing the thing you need for that. I tease him like that, and he just sits there, sewing his shirt, or his pants. (*OLD LEPA at the table chuckles to himself at the memory. NANCY is amused, but withdrawn during his recollections. The FIGURE on the memory stage ignores OLD LEPA'S jibes. He continues mending his clothes. OLD LEPA looks away both from him and from NANCY. Music in background becomes more faint.*)

OLD LEPA: We parted on a Spring morning long ago. A train of immigrants were discharged at the station where we worked. Frightened, tired people... with children holding on to mothers

... woven trunks and cloth bags piled high on the station platform. We smile at the young women, who are older than they should be, their heads covered in tied kerchiefs. They smile back. The men stare into the wind.. .looking angry, like they were late for something. The mazur and I know what they are thinking. They are scared of failure and starvation.

MAZUR (*Loudly, waving*): Welcome to Canada! (*Music remains soft in background, but becomes lively country dance.*)

OLD LEPA: And the immigrants start to laugh... talk about their long voyage... ask for a place to wash their children and cook their food.

MAZUR (*Loudly*): Please use our bunkhouse! You are welcome to it! (*Music becomes even livelier. Recorded sound of happy people's chatter can be heard briefly.*)

OLD LEPA: So many of them the floors groan under their weight. The sound of their laughter inside the bunkhouse is like music to us... it has been so long since we have seen or heard our people in a crowd. Our hearts are bursting with joy! I wish for Hanya to be here with me instead of on the cold, lonely homestead away from people, where she is milking cows and plastering walls of this house. (*On memory stage, the FIGURE rises and puts away his sewing pouch. He faces OLD LEPA.*)

MAZUR: I am leaving for northern Ontario, Ivan. The foreman said yesterday the railway is transferring men. (*OLD LEPA struggles to his feet and limpingly approaches riser to memory stage.*)

OLD LEPA (*Joyfully*): Good!... I'll go with you! I've had my fill of the bald, windy places. Maybe Ontario is better, and I can bring my Hanya out to start life all over. (*He turns to NANCY, his face*

*elated.*) I'm so happy at this thought I have to open the buttons on my tunic to cool off. The mazur turns away from me, shaking his head... I can still see him like that. (*FIGURE turns away, shaking his head.*)

MAZUR (*Sadly*): You don't understand, hutzul. Only / am going. The foreman says they only want one man.

OLD LEPA (To NANCY) : My heart races... with regret, sorrow. I cannot see myself working alone without this mazur. This flat-faced fool in cracked boots... crossing himself before he eats... his fingers bleeding with callouses... thanking God for the watery turnip soup we are about to swallow. Who gave away every second pay cheque to the church... and sends the rest to his mother in Warszawa. Who does without tobacco or a new shirt so that the ones he loved will not forget him. (*Music dies out. OLD LEPA turns to the FIGURE and shouts, for the FIGURE is slowly moving offstage.*) Hey, mazur! (*The FIGURE turns to face him.*) Hey, mazur!... Write to me sometimes. Tell me where and how you are!

MAZUR (*Through tears*): Don't make fun of me now, Ivan! You know I can't write. (*They wave farewell to each other. OLD LEPA wipes tears on the sleeve of his shirt and he stumbles blindly to his table, to sit wearily, his head in his hands.*)

OLD LEPA (To himself): Mazur, my mazur...how *did* you live? And where are you now? In some old man's home, or under the earth? You are on my mind, as is she... the wife I lost so long ago. The mother of my Stefan, of whom I am not worthy. Had you and I remained in the old country, mazur, we would have been enemies... soldiers in two different armies, and that's



for sure. We might have shot each other dead for the honour of homelands that had no use for us. Yet thrown upon each other as we were for a few short seasons in this country of wind and ice, we became closer than brothers... more loving than we were to our wives... sisters... children....

(NANCY *has been busy writing notes in her papers during his memory dialogue. She rustles fresh paper. He looks up, startled by her. She glances up at him.*)

NANCY: Do you want me to make us some coffee, Mister Lepa?

OLD LEPA: You here again, woman from government?

NANCY (*Laughing*): Yes... I came in while you were dreaming.

OLD LEPA (*Gruffly*): What's that *dreaming* business? I was busy writing. You should learn to knock on doors!

NANCY (*Smiling*): I find it difficult to understand how you never heard news of your friend again. It would help so much if we knew where he was.

OLD LEPA: Leave my friends alone—stay out of my life!

NANCY (*Rising to prepare coffee*): You shouldn't stay indoors like this. It's a beautiful day outside... birds singing, a soft wind from the south....

OLD LEPA: I like it right here! NANCY: You're being stubborn....

OLD LEPA: When I was young, and stood on my own soil... I saw beautiful things...so beautiful they almost left me blind! No birds...no soft winds...that is the woman's thing. I saw fire and ice... I heard a land begging to be helped give birth to so many good things—iron, trees as hard as stone...food. You don't know the land, so go away. Get in your goddamned car and drive so I never see you again!

NANCY: Later. But first, let me get your coffee. (*She brings coffee to him, takes her seat.*)

OLD LEPA: Sure... I'm old. You will do what you are going to do. (*He sighs in resignation and takes a long, noisy sip from his cup. NANCY watches him and laughs, then tosses her briefcase on the table, scattering his playing cards, sheets of the letter he is writing. He bends to collect the items, then reconsiders.*) You pick that up, woman!

NANCY (*Sternly*): Later.

OLD LEPA (*Angrily*): I said—pick it up! That's my property. I want to play cards or write, that's my business!

NANCY: Nope.

OLD LEPA: You say... nope?

NANCY: That's right. Later I'll even clean your house for you. But first, I have other work to do, and we'll do it my way from now on. Back to the beginning, Mister Lepa—what happened to your landing card? Immigration documents? All the paper you needed to get into the country?

OLD LEPA (*Wearily, still staring at papers on floor*): My Canadian papers got burned. Hanya was burning old catalogues and letters long ago. She made a mistake. (*Furious.*) But I don't have to tell you, so you get the hell out!

NANCY (*Crisply, ignoring outburst*): Hanya... burned them then?

OLD LEPA: Yes. She made mistakes like that. (*To himself*) What the hell am I telling her that for?... (NANCY *glances quickly at him, but he is troubled by his own futility in being pushed along by her. NANCY hides a smile behind her hand momentarily.*)

NANCY: When did you apply for re-issues?

OLD LEPA: Huh?

NANCY: You *did* get the documents replaced, did you not? OLD LEPA (*Exasperated*): Sure, I applied. NANCY: What happened?

OLD LEPA: The government sent me all kinds of questions. Envelope this big full of questions I don't understand... so I throw them away.

NANCY: One date... that's all my supervisor needs, Mister Lepa. One recorded date on which you were alive after your presumed death in the Timmins mine.

OLD LEPA (*Angry*): A hundred times I tell you already that I am alive!

NANCY (*Firmly*): I need something more substantial than your word for that!

(*He fumbles in his pants pocket and takes out a closed pocket-knife, which he opens and swings under her nose. She is startled and freezes.*)

OLD LEPA: Alright.. .get a quart jar by the stove! (*Points knife to other wrist.*) I cut that vein there and fill the sonofabitch to the brim. ..you can take *that* to your boss—a present from Ivan Lepa! Come on—you bring the jar, I do the rest! Come on, I got to die sometime, anyway! (*NANCY is shaken. He puts the knife away.*)

NANCY (*Quietly*): I don't think... that would be necessary. An old bill of sale might do as well, Mister Lepa.

OLD LEPA: I bought seventeen cows... eight horses, and all my farm machinery on my word and a handshake!

NANCY: I'm glad it went that well for you. However, I can't prepare a legal statement based on your feelings. Not even when you fortify them with horses, dogs... goats... or any other peasant ammunition!

OLD LEPA (*Rising to the challenge*): Ah, ha!... Now it comes out! I'm an *old peasant* now... you have to deal with an old peasant, and you don't like that! It's not very nice for a pretty city girl with such soft hands and new clothes! You couldn't say that... it had to slip out by mistake!

NANCY (*Also roaring*): That's right... that's exactly it, Mister Lepa—you *are* an old peasant! An obstinate peasant who has no need of a pension. There should be no pensions for people like you!

OLD LEPA: What's that? What did I hear you say?

NANCY (*Nose to nose with him*): I think the government should give you a few carrot and turnip seeds. You can plant them... watch them grow... harvest them and make yourself soup. And as you eat your soup, you can pontificate to your four walls as to how you did right, while the rest of the world is skidding down to hell!

(*They lean across the table, glaring at each other. The old man suddenly breaks into laughter. She immediately laughs with him and reaches out to pat his hand reassuringly. They each pick up their coffee cups and toast each other silently. A long moment passes, while they listen to distant sounds of a train whistle.*)

OLD LEPA: Ech! What's the world coming to now? NANCY: When you were first married... what was it like?

OLD LEPA (*With mock outrage*): Shame on you asking like that! Go try it yourself, if you want to know. (*NANCY is embarrassed.*)

NANCY: I... didn't mean *that*...

OLD LEPA: Then what did you mean if you didn't want to know *that*?

NANCY: I wondered... how difficult was it to live? My life was one where I had all the food I wanted... there was television, books, records... a car. Then when I went to work, I found there were people who had none of those things... ever! (OLD LEPA *looks tenderly at her.*)

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): Aye, it was difficult, child.... Everything is difficult for some of us. It is difficult not to have an education. I think sometimes if I had been born to a different mother, I might have been a doctor... or a train conductor. It's difficult to live longer than my father lived.

NANCY: I am afraid sometimes I would not survive if one day... if one day the office where I go to work vanished. Or I went to start my car and found all its wheels gone!

OLD LEPA: When I was born, men cut fields with scythes, and women beat grain on the threshing floor... like they did a thousand years before. In this country, as a young man, I ploughed fields with two horses pulling a hand plow. Today, twice a day, morning and evening, I see a jet airplane fly high over my house carrying people who never see me or my house, because it's too small to see from up there!

NANCY: That's true. When I fly, I bury my face in a book.

OLD LEPA (*Overwhelmed*): Think of it! A small book... smaller than my hand. And what it says is bigger than my house... my life. It is always more interesting to an educated person in the sky than me on the ground below! And here I am, with time left over to stand and watch the sunset... and dream that in that great fire I see something... something men call God, and my heart is filled with excitement... thirst....

(*He rises and hobbles with his weak back restlessly around the room. He is excited and, turning to her, his face reveals a profound agitation.*)

OLD LEPA: And yet, it's too fast, I tell you!

NANCY: What's too fast?

OLD LEPA: Life!... The feeling... the seeing... the suffering!

(*Faint sound of robust folk music. His step lightens as he paces in time to the music.*)

OLD LEPA: I should live two hundred years to make sense of everything I have seen! But what have I learned? From one hurry-up day to another... long winter and short summer... then another, and another. Time... she's like a hurricane over my head, and I am bent to the ground, tearing up roots and stones to make food to eat. Or cutting trees standing this deep in snow. Or repairing track to keep trains running in a straight line. I see so much that I don't know what I see! And to think— an educated person says—that's not enough—give me more!

NANCY: Are you religious, Mister Lepa?

OLD LEPA (*Vehemently*): No! Never! (*He begins to pace angrily to sound of music.*)

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): I have been called many things in my time, but never a religious man. I have no time for religious men! It might be different for a woman... I think my Hanya did some praying when I was gone. I came to Canada so I would never bend my knee to another man. For me the road to God was always blocked by a priest.

NANCY: I don't believe you.

OLD LEPA: Believe what you want. When I was a small boy, I said to myself—if I'm that important to God... if he really worries about me, then he must show me another road. So, one day I stood in a meadow and yelled to the clouds, "Show me! Show me another way with no churches... no fat, sleepy priests in the pay of police and feudal landlords from some other country!"

NANCY: Did God reply? (OLD LEPA grins *at her*.)

OLD LEPA: Naw. I think the God I was calling to was satisfied with what he had down there in that small village. I waited until night for him to speak to me. I lay on the grass... tired and afraid. The sky got black, but there was silence. Either God had nothing to say, or there was no room in his temple for a man like me. I walked home in the dark to my father's house, thinking... that's alright—if God has no time to speak with me, then I'm gonna find freedom for myself! (*Music dies out. OLD LEPA returns to table and sits down heavily. He is depressed.*)

NANCY: Did you?

OLD LEPA: No. There is no freedom for the living. And right now there is a pain in my head from all this talking, child. You eat what I say without chewing. If I was to give you my whole life on a plate, you would eat it in ten forkfuls and then bang on the plate for more! What kind of person are you? (NANCY *laughs*.)

NANCY: You're right. You're absolutely right!

(NANCY *begins to bang her teaspoon against the lip of her coffee cup. The banging subsides to a slow, rhythmical beat over OLD LEPA's words.*)

OLD LEPA: I go to visit my son at Marina and Dmitro's house., I carry presents, for he is only a boy, and what little I send to support him is not enough. Not the money,. .I always found money. It was not seeing him except on holidays, and always in *their* house....

(MARINA and DMITRO *enter memory stage and mime preparation of food at a sink and stove which is not there.*)

OLD LEPA: Always in *their* house with its embroidered cloth over and under which costs more than fifty dollars... *their* house with Ukrainian calendars printed in New York and all the saints' days in red. Paper flowers in vases. And on the wall the plaster crucifix of a tormented Christ with the face of a dim-witted time-keeper I once knew in a Winnipeg hat factory.

(NANCY *begins to laugh, still beating time on her cup.*) I laugh through tears when I come into their house. Sometimes I have to have a few drinks before I find the courage to come through their door. After the first big laugh, I have to be quiet.

(OLD LEPA *turns to MARINA and DMITRO and laughs heartily. MARINA lifts her finger reproachfully to her lips and shushes him to be silent.*)

OLD LEPA: They learned to speak softly... so softly I have to put my hand to my ear and holler. (*Raises his hand to cup back of his ear. Loudly.*) Eh? What'd you say?

MARINA (*Finger to her lips*): Shh!

OLD LEPA (*Still loudly*): Ah—shush yourself, woman! How are you both?

DMITRO: Keep it down! Keep it down, Ivan!

OLD LEPA: Dmitro, the merchant, is now wearing a small Englishman's moustache. A white shirt and dark tie. His shoulders hunch... not with the cares of the world, but with the humiliation at the goodness of his life. He joins every club that will have him as a member...

but he is restless and driven by things he will not speak of....

DMITRO: Keep it down, brother. The boy is sleeping.

MARINA (*Coldly*): Leave him be, Dmitro. Can't you see he's been drinking again! Phew! The smell of his breath would sicken a dog.

OLD LEPA (To NANCY): My sister... thin, sad... polishes and cleans as if the stains of sin were smudged on everything she owns. She is leader of the local nationalist language group, determined to bring back the Dark Ages to the Ukraine. (*Begins a slow, measured advance into the stage area of memory.*) She is consumed with hatred and distrust of her homeland, now a socialist state for longer than she has lived. At the sink, she cleans. I come to her and put my hands on her shoulders. She stands like she was made of ice. (*OLD LEPA has gone to MARINA and placed his hands on her shoulders. She becomes motionless at his touch.*)

MARINA (*Nervously*): What do you want, Ivan?

OLD LEPA: Go sit, Marina. Let Dmitro and me wash up the dishes.

MARINA: I'll do it. That is not a man's work.

OLD LEPA: To hell it is! In Soviet Ukraine, the communists made a law that says men and women who work in factories should cook, wash dishes and raise families together when they come home. Otherwise—divorce! On the spot! (*OLD LEPA laughs. MARINA shudders.*)

MARINA (*Tensely*): Ivan, godlessness is no joke. Neither is the slavery of our people! I would not laugh in this house if I was you!

(*OLD LEPA attempts to kiss her cheek, but turns away and goes back to his seat at the table. He drops his head into his hands.*)

OLD LEPA: I will try... not to laugh....

DMITRO (*Tries to establish pleasantries*): It is good to see you again. You look good. You working men are sure lucky to have all that fresh air and exercise.

MARINA (*Concerned*): What's wrong, Ivan? Have I upset you?

OLD LEPA (*Mournfully*): Ask your husband... ask yourself, Marina. Do you still remember words spoke by dying men to the living? Learn from others, but remember who you are, they said— for we were slaves tasting the freedom of escape.

DMITRO: I don't remember anyone saying that. But I'll ask my business associates to enlighten me if they can.

OLD LEPA: Your business associates, Dmitro, wouldn't know if their assholes came with their bodies, or were stitched on later!

MARINA (*Sharply*): Ivan!

OLD LEPA: I came to see my son. And to taste black bread, which has vanished from the earth....

MARINA: Stefanko is asleep. I will wake him soon. (*Pause.*) I've... enrolled him in language school this winter. (*OLD LEPA lifts his head. He is startled.*)

OLD LEPA: No one asked... or told me. But I'm glad. He will soon be able to read the old stories and poetry. Ah, but that will be something! (*DMITRO and MARINA exchange glances.*)

DMITRO is *nervous.*)

DMITRO (*With forced cheeriness*): Shall we talk about the old days, brother?

OLD LEPA: Shit on the old days! (*To MARINA.*) What is going on? MARINA: Perhaps... in

time....

OLD LEPA: Is there something wrong with his eyes? Or his hearing? You can tell me!

DMITRO: When we went to school in the old country... such books ... if they indeed existed... were forbidden to us. I think ...*we* think... for Stefan to learn to read and write in the language... is enough.

OLD LEPA (*Stormy*): Prayer book language—is that it? / don't want my son crippled by ignorance, the way we were! To learn the dialect of a language... which is all we learned... is *not* enough! Some way, I'll move heaven and earth to pay, but he must have nothing less than the best education! (MARINA *stiffens and glares at him accusingly*.)

MARINA: Listen to him—this father! Setting the world to rights again without benefit of God or people of some wisdom! Look at him, Dmitro... look at him, will you? Homeless, calloused — a muzhik with nothing but a useless homestead to his name... and he's demanding that his son become nothing less than a hetman himself! (*She laughs scornfully*. OLD LEPA spits *to side of his table*.)

DMITRO (*Placating*): Enough, Marushka! That's enough! You hear what I say?

OLD LEPA (*Provocative*): Don't argue with her—hit her! Across the nose!

MARINA (To DMITRO): Don't Marushka me! (To OLD LEPA.) And you.... I'll forget I heard that! (OLD LEPA *grins*. MARINA *sees and is furious*.) Why are you smiling, eh? And who do you think you are to come here roaring like some wild animal? It was peaceful before you came.... (OLD LEPA *turns away from her and shakes his head in dejection*.)

OLD LEPA: What sort of school have you put him in to learn the language? Why do I think I already know the answer to that question?

(MARINA is *on verge of tears*. She *wipes her eyes*. She *becomes quiet, conciliatory*.)

MARINA: My church runs language classes, Ivan. I take them there, and save on fees by helping the priest keep the children under control. You should watch your pennies. So should we.... (OLD LEPA *grabs for his scribbler and begins writing his letter furiously*. NANCY rises *and, taking her briefcase, lingers*.)

NANCY: Mister Lepa... I have to leave now....

(*He is oblivious to her*. DMITRO and MARINA *exit*. NANCY *reaches with her hand to OLD LEPA, but reconsiders and leaves him*. Frog sounds from outside of house. STEFAN *enters into memory stage and looks down at his father expectantly*.)

OLD LEPA (*As he writes*): My dear son—do you remember that Christmas when I came to see you at your aunt and uncle's house? "Look at what I brought you," I said to you, and together we opened the parcels... a shawl for your aunt Marina... a bottle of the good stuff for your uncle. And at the bottom of the bag—a wooden train—for you.

STEFAN: I'll come and help you with farm work in the summers, father. But I can't live with you.

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): Push it—pull it. Do anything you wish, nothing will break, even if you throw it, I remember telling you. And then I said....

OLD LEPA (*Softly, gently, the old man*): Who knows? One day you may be a train engineer, and your old man working on the section to keep your train running through all kinds of weather.

STEFAN: Did you hear me, father? (*Music faintly in background—a plaintive warrior's*

*lament.)*

OLD LEPA: That's it... that's it—I shout to you... as soon as you grow up, I will talk to my section foreman about getting you on with me. He's a Swede, but a good man. We'll make a team, you and I! They'll put our names in a book for what we did... who we were....

STEFAN (*Boyish, uncomfortable*): I'll help you with the farm this summer, like I promised I would do....

OLD LEPA: He was a good worker, but he had weak lungs, like his mother. In the dust, he coughed, so I took it easy on him, like I would have with a girl. In the evening, we walked across the field to the house... the field and stubble red with the setting sun. So beautiful, it took your breath away. He was seventeen

... a silky beard glowing on his cheeks, as if his face had also caught fire. "Do you like it here, Stefan?" I ask him....

STEFAN: It's hard to make a living... but I feel good....

(OLD LEPA *turns to STEFAN in memory, brushing away tears from his cheek. Music rises slightly over his words.*)

OLD LEPA: It's hard to make a living, that's true. But in the morning, the air is sweet and clean. The soil has stones, but with good cultivation, crops will always grow. And on an evening such as this, the world wrapped in cold flame, and the land beneath your feet singing....

STEFAN (*Tormented*): You need more land, father!

OLD LEPA: What the hell for? There will be enough to eat for the two of us!

STEFAN (*In a near shout*): You need more land!

(*Music dies. OLD LEPA looks down at his hands. He is a failure in his own estimation, and deeply distressed. His words lack conviction. The joviality is forced, strained.*)

OLD LEPA: No problem. We can clear another twenty acres of bush ... who needs that bush, anyway? Right after harvest we can start. You and I together... oh, will we make our axes fly! Cut up and sell the bigger trees for cordwood and burn the rest. Next spring, we break the ground and every bit of land there is gets sown into wheat....

STEFAN: That's not what I want, father! (OLD LEPA *straightens, but cannot face his son in memory.*)

OLD LEPA: In this house... I'll build a room for you so you can have your own place to sleep.

Nothing fancy like your uncle Dmitro's place, but clean, with lots of windows for the sun....

STEFAN: I'll come to help you in the summers—I promise! But I can't live with you. (OLD LEPA *turns to face STEFAN. Hi's back is tormenting him and each motion is agony.*)

OLD LEPA: Why not? Are you ashamed of me because of who I am?... That I never had a house like others... or a car? What's wrong with this house? (*Strikes table hard with his fist.*) It's built to last, like the furniture! This isn't a mud hut I'm living in, you know! I placed the logs and she plastered with clay and straw so it would last a long time—show me a city house built today that's as strong!

STEFAN (*Upset*): Please, father....

OLD LEPA (*With agitation and fury*): I did not give you up. I would, if I could, have cared for you myself. But who would hire a man in the mines or on the wheatlands when he comes to work with a child?... What life would that be for you?

STEFAN: You don't have to tell me that... I know!

OLD LEPA: So now you are a man... Dmitro and Marina were *not* your parents—I am!

STEFAN (*Turning away*): I know....

OLD LEPA: I love them for what they did, but I do not admire them, Stefan. They are timid, and they asked for, and received—the worst of things this land gives. I would have wished for stronger people to have helped raise you to manhood. (STEFAN *stiffens*.)

STEFAN: Don't say that. They are good people! (OLD LEPA *throws up his hands. But he is determined in his condemnation. Warrior music begins and builds softly.*)

OLD LEPA: If that were enough... to be *good* people... I would kiss their feet for joy! For me, poor as I am...that is not enough. They have settled for a tray of coloured eggs at Easter, and promises of something else they will never taste or touch. Nothing is given to those who sit quietly... trusting in the kindnesses of others. Nothing!

STEFAN: I don't know what you're saying!

OLD LEPA: This is a place where tenderness has no meaning... no one weeps except the immigrants! We are not people, I have heard some angry men say... we are not people until we learn to fight. Others say—do what the strong ones ask—even if it costs you pride. Who is right in this?

STEFAN: I have never heard such talk. (OLD LEPA *stumbles up to memory stage and reaches to touch his son.*)

OLD LEPA: I don't know how the world is put together. It's enough to learn how to be a good worker and maybe if you're lucky, have a family. But I am afraid for you, Stefan.

STEFAN: Why? I'm alright. Really, I am.

OLD LEPA: Alright is nothing. I want you to understand this country and be ready for it. I want you to move away from the shadows of a priest's skirts... there is no place for that—here. The old men and women can talk about that if they wish... but for you, it is an old darkness from which you must run if you are to be a man for this country. (STEFAN *shudders and sobs in his father's embrace.*) That I know....

STEFAN: I can't do that. I'm sorry, father. But I am a Christian and I must go to church as I have been trained to do. (*Music dies abruptly.*)

OLD LEPA (*Drily*): Yes... yes... I understand....

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): How wretched that moment was! I felt myself aging, turning grey in his presence... the taste of ashes in my mouth and a coldness creeping through my flesh into my bones.

STEFAN: I don't want to farm. I'll help you, but I can't come here to live. I want to finish school and go to university. I want to become a school teacher. (*They slowly begin to pace back and forth, side by side.*)

OLD LEPA: Good. (*Begins to be excited.*) There *had* been a teacher before in my family—did you know?

STEFAN: No one told me.

OLD LEPA: Uncle Mikita... lived two doors down the street in our village in the old country. He walked with a stoop, but his eyes were those of an eagle. When they clouded with anger, heaven itself darkened... there was a man! I can still see him like it was yesterday, coming



down the road, his books on his arm....

(UNCLE MIKITA *enters in shadows of memory stage. He has books on his arm. He raises his arm to OLD LEPA, who stops.*)

UNCLE MIKITA (*Declaiming*): Don't read Shevchenko like nuns murmuring vespers at sundown! Children! Read him with fists clenched... blood racing in your ears... your eyes turned to the uplands of the spirit!

OLD LEPA (To STEFAN, *resuming walk*): I still hear his words ringing in my ears. As children, we were afraid for him, because the country was over-run by occupation troops of yet another foreign country.

STEFAN: Why? What would happen? (OLD LEPA *stops and stares at STEFAN. UNCLE MIKITA remains frozen, one arm poised, the other holding books.*)

OLD LEPA: Dmitro and Marina never told you?

STEFAN: No.

OLD LEPA: Let me tell you then. Uncle Mikita, the teacher, was returning one evening from the library. Two soldiers, blind with drink, staggered out of the tavern, dragging their rifles with fixed bayonets, the stocks clattering on the cobbles. The soldiers saw my uncle. One of them raised his rifle and stabbed at the books my uncle was carrying. The books fell to the street. (UNCLE MIKITA *mimes the incident, dropping the books.*)

SOLDIER (RECORDED VOICE) (*Slurring*): Stop!... Are you a horse... or a goat?

OLD LEPA: Uncle Mikita bent down to pick up his books.... (UNCLE MIKITA *mimes action.*)

SOLDIER (RECORDED VOICE): Yantik—look! He is not a goat or horse! He...is a dog...a field dog. See how he falls on all fours before his masters? Bark for us, dog!

OLD LEPA: They laughed, and my uncle reached for a loose cobble. But one of the soldiers saw the move and brought the butt of his rifle down on my uncle's hand... smashing it with a crunching sound. My uncle said nothing, but I saw blood trickling from his lips as he chewed his tongue with pain....

SOLDIER (RECORDED VOICE) (*In drunken anger*): I said bark for us! (*Sound of people's angry voices in background—recorded. Music—melody of a traditional lament.*)

OLD LEPA: As a crowd gathered, the soldiers became wild with fear and rage. My uncle looked at the soldier who had hurt him. "You wretched fool," I heard him say... the last words he said. For the soldier who had hurt him lunged at my uncle with his rifle, burying the bayonet to the hilt in his back. (*In mime, UNCLE MIKITA plays out details of his mortal injury in shadowy stage.*) The teacher coughed and slowly...his head drooping first, died on the street where he taught children to read poetry and be proud....

(*Music fades and dies out. Light on UNCLE MIKITA goes to darkness. Horrified, STEFAN stands frozen momentarily. Then he and OLD LEPA separate. STEFAN exits. OLD LEPA returns to his table and resumes writing his letter.*)

OLD LEPA (*Writing*): My dear son... I remembered today when you were a young man. I almost forgot I wanted to write to you to scold you. It is a difficult thing to do. I remembered good things from the hours we spent together then.... (*He lifts the scribbler and squints at what he has written.*)

OLD LEPA (*Impatiently*): Goddammit! Why am I afraid to speak directly to a son who is a

grown man? This will not do! I have made up my mind to say it, and say it I will.... (*Writes again.*) Stefan... your father is disappointed in you. There—that's better! (*Ponders.*) But he will read this far and wonder what I am saying... why I say it. He knows... sure he knows! And yet—as it his fault? Or was she to blame? (NANCY *enters and sits across the table from OLD LEPA. She waves to him in greeting. He nods indifferently. She opens her briefcase and removes some papers.*)

NANCY (*Cheerfully*): I saw my grandfather this morning.

OLD LEPA: That's good. (*Writing*) I start to write to you, and she comes to visit. She came yesterday morning—she came last week, and the week before that, with more forms to fill and news of her goddamn grandfather, who I think she put into an old man's home over his objections....

NANCY: Are you ignoring me, Mister Lepa? OLD LEPA: Yes.

NANCY: My grandfather is like you. You should visit him.

OLD LEPA: What for?

NANCY: He could use the company. So can you.

OLD LEPA: I don't need company. (*She watches him for a moment as he struggles with his letter.*)

NANCY: If you wish, I could drive you over to the retirement home where he lives.

OLD LEPA: I don't wish.

NANCY: Well—excuse me for suggesting....

OLD LEPA: Retirement homes are like ice in my heart. All those old men sitting around with blankets on their knees, listening for their hearts to stop. (NANCY grins.)

NANCY: Not all the time. Sometimes they play bingo....

OLD LEPA (*Gruffly*): How happy they must be. Now go away. I'm busy!

NANCY: Or get visited by unemployed youth on government grants, who instruct them in how to knit a pair of socks.

OLD LEPA: Shit!

NANCY: Or make a pot out of mud! (OLD LEPA *glares in disbelief at her.*)

OLD LEPA: You shut up your mouth, okay? I'm not in a mood for funning.

NANCY: I don't think you've had breakfast, or you'd be in a better mood. Can I make you some food?

OLD LEPA: There's nothing to eat. My pension didn't come this month... same's last month.... (*He glares at her provocatively, to see if his barb has drawn blood. She does not respond. Instead, she rises and pours him and herself a cup of coffee.*)

NANCY: You don't look as if you slept much last night. Have you seen a doctor about that back of yours? You should, you know, or your pension—when it comes—will be going to a man in a wheelchair.

OLD LEPA.- Yah?... I went to a doctor for my eyes last summer. When I got there, the girl in front says to me—"Mister Leper—the doctor can't see you today. But he asked me to arrange your eyes four days apart next week, if that's convenient!" (*Chokes on laughter.*) I don't go to doctors no more. (NANCY *also explodes into laughter. Neither of them can stop their amusement, and laugh like children.*)

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): I must stop this laughing—what's wrong with me? Look at me—tears leaking out of my eyes—nose running—and all because I'm laughing so much! She may be a pretty girl, but she is the government... who's starting to pour me coffee as if I was some thirsty paralytic. I know now I have let her visit too much and stay too long. I will throw her out of my house!... But she stops laughing just like that and grabs her goddamned papers again. And I am staring at her through running eyes, my mouth wide open!... (*He stops laughing and warily takes out his handkerchief and blows his nose noisily, playing for time. She is over-confident.*)

NANCY: Well, that felt good, Mister Lepa. A few more questions to clean things up. Have you any bank records?

OLD LEPA: No.

NANCY: And, of course, no social insurance number? OLD LEPA: If you know, why ask?

NANCY (*Grinning maliciously*): Thought I might trick you! What about hospitalization?

OLD LEPA (*Uneasily*): What about it?

NANCY: Have you been in a hospital since the mine accident?

OLD LEPA: I take good care of myself... jump out of the way fast.

NANCY: My superiors or bosses, as you might call them, have agreed to a statutory declaration you can sign after I've prepared it. Supported by declarations from your sister... your brother-in-law... your son.

OLD LEPA: Hold it! Hold it! You don't do that... no damn way! NANCY: Why not?

OLD LEPA: I would die sooner than have my family swear I am old and need money to live! You think I have no pride?

NANCY (*Taunting*): Pride is cheap. Groceries cost money.

OLD LEPA (*Angry*): Hey.. .you watch what you say! I don't want to hear that kind of talk in my house! (*She studies him. He turns his chair and back to her, then turns to pick up his coffee before turning away from her again.*)

NANCY: It would be so simple. OLD LEPA: I'm not listening to you!

NANCY: If you'd been bad and done something to get yourself arrested years ago.

OLD LEPA (*Visibly shaken*): Shit!...

NANCY: That hasn't happened, has it, Mister Lepa?

OLD LEPA (To *himself*): I'm not telling! No pension is worth that... I would rather starve, beg... steal. I know she's looking at me... I can feel that government smile, right in the middle of my back, like a needle....

NANCY: It's your pension, Mister Lepa.... OLD LEPA: I cancel! Get in your car and go to hell!

NANCY (*Laughing*): You *cancel*? OLD LEPA: Yah. I cancel!

NANCY: I'm not a subscription to a newspaper. You can't just *cancel* me, Mister Lepa. (Grins.)

After all, I represent the government of Canada... I'm a servant of the crown! Cancel *that*!

(OLD LEPA *turns his chair roughly toward her.*)

OLD LEPA: There's no king in Canada—so take your goddamn crown and....

NANCY: Now, now....

OLD LEPA (*Inflamed*): With these hands I make this country... I make the pensions! I make your job! So don't bring me no crown. (NANCY *roars with laughter and slaps the table, as if*

*goads him in her amusement. OLD LEPA settles down and holds his temper in check with difficulty.)*

NANCY: If I have to, I'll talk to your sister... your son....

OLD LEPA (*Glowering*): You keep my Stefan out of this! And you stop that hitting, right now!

NANCY: If he can help, so much the better.

OLD LEPA: He's a busy man... principal of a school and not to be bothered.

NANCY (*Firmly*): Then *you* tell me!

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): Jesus, but her eyes are like steel. Whoever trained her trained a policeman, and that's for sure....

NANCY: If you were in trouble with the law, and the incident is recorded sometime after 1934, then it's all the verification I need. And by the way—I don't have the slightest interest in what you did to get in trouble!

OLD LEPA (*Defiant*): I bet you don't. To hell with you—you'll never find out!

NANCY: Oh yes I will—I'll find out!

OLD LEPA: Besides, I was never in that kind of trouble!

NANCY: I already know—the question remaining is the exact date.

OLD LEPA (*Wary*): Who told you?

NANCY: You did. I can see it written all over you—Ivan Lepa, the gangster!

OLD LEPA: I'm not gonna speak! My lips are shut! You sit and wait until tomorrow... but you don't hear me say a thing!

*(Sounds of happy country dance music rise in background. NANCY stares at OLD LEPA, who elaborately arranges contents of his table, sips his coffee, goes to a cupboard and pours himself a drink of brandy. He carries the bottle to the table, but does not offer her a drink.)*

OLD LEPA (*To himself*): Three years after Vladek died, I go to Vancouver, I'm walking by the post office, and there is a big meeting on the street. Unemployed men are demanding work. All my life I give money to the labour movement, but I don't go to meetings. There's no work, and a meeting don't change that. But this time I stop to listen. I don't see the police—nobody does. They attack from behind where I'm standing—clubbing and pulling men away. Two of them knock me to the pavement. I'm big and strong in them days, so I jump to my feet and kick one bastard down and throw the other against the building so hard his hat falls off. Then I run as fast as I can. Behind me, they're chasing. "Get that big sonofabitch!" I hear one of them shout. I'm in an alley when they jump me a second time. I fall down and they hold me by the pantlegs. I get to my hands and knees and kick to get free. But my suspenders rip and I'm out of my pants. Now they got me around the neck....

*(At the table, OLD LEPA throws his hands up in resignation and enters into an animated, mimed discussion of the incident with NANCY. She laughs and makes rapid additional notes to an affidavit she has already prepared. She silently reads excerpts from it. He cheerfully corrects it, gets another glass and pours her a brandy. They have become friends again, and OLD LEPA pushes back his cloth cap as he tells her of additional facts related to the incident. Country music continues in background.)*

OLD LEPA: They take me in my shirt and underwear to the police station. They say they are going to charge me with unlawful assembly and resisting arrest. They use so many big words

I don't know what they're saying.

NANCY: But that's not what you were charged with?

OLD LEPA: Naw.... When I come to court the next morning, a judge with whiskers so big they cover his mouth asks me if I committed something called indecent exposure. (*Laughs.*)

"Sure," I tell him, and I'm laughing, because I wonder how the sound came out so clear from his mouth with so much hair covering the hole.

NANCY. So he sentenced you....

OLD LEPA: He gives me seven days in jail. But I never see jail... because after he said that, I am taken to the room where there are a lot of other men... some from the meeting... others drunks ... thieves... maybe murderers — I don't know. I can't tell what a man did by the look on his face. They divide us up after the morning court, and I get mixed up with someone else who is in the toilet and I walk out the door with the innocent ones and nobody calls me back or tries to stop me.

(*Music fades out over their laughter. NANCY completes her notation and hands the papers to OLD LEPA to sign. He hesitates, then shrugs and signs with a flourish. They share another brandy as she packs away her papers.*)

OLD LEPA: You... knew all about that business when you come here today?

NANCY: Yes.

OLD LEPA: Who told you?

NANCY: Come on... Mister Lepa... you know I can't tell you.

OLD LEPA: Stefan! You saw Stefan and he told you!

NANCY: Now what makes you think that?

OLD LEPA: If Marina and Dmitro told on me, they would come to me right away to say they betrayed me. That's what good people with no education do—they betray you and then ask forgiveness! (*NANCY is amused and sips on her brandy.*)

NANCY: But your son is an educated man, so....

OLD LEPA: An educated man does what he thinks is right and forgets he did it. I don't like that forgetting. I will tell him that. I am going to write him a long letter to give him hell for saying what is none of his business. And for you... I thank you for doing your job. But I don't thank you for putting your nose into my personal....

NANCY: Your... *personal*?

OLD LEPA: That's right. And if you don't know what that means, then you got some learning to do yet. (*OLD LEPA returns to his letter.*)

NANCY: My grandfather... you and he might have a lot in common. You and he should meet... someday.

OLD LEPA: Sure, sure, sometime when I got nothing to do. Maybe Monday, eh? (*NANCY thoughtfully gathers her papers and exits.*

*Country music comes up in background.*)

OLD LEPA: (*Writing*): My dear Stef an... I am going to write him. My son—outside my kitchen window, the fields seem on fire in a red glow from the setting sun... (*Stops writing briefly*)... That's a good letter—that's the way a man writes a letter to his son! (*Resumes writing*) But even though the light of god—if there is *a* god—washes over everything I see, I feel stiff and

drained this evening. She has been here... and we have both drunk brandy, like two men, from a bottle I saved for the difficult nights. Never mind—I can buy another. She wrote in her papers for over an hour today, and then she left. Meadowlarks were singing as she wrote.. .but I don't think she heard them. Now she is gone, and I feel like a dying man who has closed the big book on his life. I sit in a wooden chair... the light dying ... and wait for the last forms to be filled before the gathering darkness shuts out all remaining light. (*He pauses and stares at the paper.*) Stefan—a man wants to feel he can trust his children. (*Writes quickly, furiously. Breaks his pencil and throws the pieces across the room.*) No, that is not the way to say it.... (*He ponders. Music rises in volume slightly. Suddenly he slaps the table with his hands, his expression elated. He dictates the letter to himself.*)

OLD LEPA: Ah! It should go like this—Stefan... a man wants to be remembered for the good things he made possible... not the stupid things, but the good things. I once knew a man who always carried spare tobacco in <his pockets. He was a blockhead with nothing to say, but men talking allowed him to stand with them, because when tobacco ran out, we could always turn to Ignace for a smoke!... For this, he is remembered... you see how easily he comes to mind, even now.... (*Light begins to die down. OLD LEPA chuckles and then laughs over remainder of his monologue.*) I once worked for a widow who used the ashes of her husband to glaze a serving dish on which she put turkey meat. That was in Saskatchewan, where all things are possible, just before the war started. Another time, in Mundare, I saw.... (*Light goes to darkness quickly on OLD LEPA'S sardonic laughter. His laughter and background country dance music continue into darkness, the music rising to drown out his monologue.*)

## CURTAIN